

JOHN STRACHAN
comes to
CORNWALL 1803-1812



DOROTHY J. PHELPS



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1803 — 1812

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1920's and 1930's, living in Thunder Bay on the north shore of Lake Superior was to live in an era of history in the making. There still existed primitive Indian villages, Indian folk lore such as "The Sleeping Giant, Peeping Squaw, Kakabeka Falls", adding to this Fort William was the headquarters of the North West Fur Trading Company, descendants and remnants of their fast and furious life were around. The richest silver mine in the world operated on an island off its shores, short lived to be literally drowned by the omnipotent waters of great Lake Superior.

Much as a teacher could spellbind students with stories of the above, thoughts would turn hungrily to the East, where the roots of Upper Canada were planted, particularly that of the Loyalists who struggled to this young country because of their belief in our way of life and a strong desire to stand by the British Crown.

To be told the first school building in Upper Canada was built in Cornwall by John Strachan was of special significance to me, when I knew my husband was coming to the new vocational department, an ever increasing growth of the "John Strachan Grammar School". To me this was the story of school life and to no small degree of the Anglican Church in Upper Canada. On arrival I couldn't wait to investigate. The old cemeteries fascinated me, the old buildings around, Glengarry County especially.

Brought up in the Presbyterian and United Faith, I became an Anglican. The excitement I felt on entering Trinity (Bishop Strachan) Memorial Church I cannot describe. There and then my story took form.

Before closing, I must thank the Venerable Archdeacon W.D. McL. Christie, Rector of the Parish at that time, for supplying me with John Strachan papers and artifacts. I must thank also my husband who arranged to have my rough copy put into manuscript form, and the city editor for permission to reproduce two photographs which had appeared in the STANDARD-FREEHOLDER.

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DEDICATED TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

Michael

Peter

Mary

Denny

Kathy

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JOHN LEAVES SCOTLAND

In Aberdeen, Scotland, on April 12, 1778, a son was born to Elizabeth Findlayson and John Strachan. He was a small, but strong baby with blue eyes and fair hair. Naturally, his parents were very proud of their first son, and gave him his father's name, John.

Not much is known of his father, but that he was a man of strong character, as the following story indicates : He was employed as overseer of the granite quarries in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen. One day, the blast of the quarry had been prepared and did not ignite at the specified time, rather than let one of the men investigate the delay, he chose to go himself. Before he could escape, the explosion took place and he was badly injured with a flying stone, and died two days later at the age of fifty-two. He had been an honest and trustworthy man. So many attended his funeral that the procession became a half-mile long. During his life, he had never become a full member of the Presbyterian church, but was known as a non-juror, who in principle and practice could be called an Episcopalian. He used to take John to church with him quite often and

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John, in turn, loved going with his father to St. John's Episcopal Chapel in the Gallowgate. The young boy was impressed with all he saw and heard there.

We know that, while she had not too much schooling, his mother was a woman of superior understanding and good judgment. She chose to go to the Presbyterian Church, but the story is told that she used to make her children make the sign of the cross every night before going to bed.

Although John's father and mother did not attend the same church, each was very tolerant of the other's different religious views. Consequently, they lived happily and affectionately, and in comfortable circumstances, with their five children.

The death of the father left John, his two sisters, two brothers and his mother without a cent of money coming in to keep them. John was fourteen years of age at the time. He was a good student. The father of a friend of his, aware of this, found work for him as a tutor of the children of a well-to-do family. In after years he told of the delight it gave him to take his earnings home to his mother. Her great anxiety was that he must get an education. Apparently they prospered somehow, because it is recorded that at the age of sixteen John entered Aberdeen University. Since the school term lasted only five months, for seven months he would earn the much-needed money. He was able to obtain a bursary from the University and, being a hard worker, he became a great favourite of the professors, who found pupils for him to teach. In this way, he was able to help his mother and managed to stay on at University as well. He wrote: "Never was there a more excellent

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mother than mine. She made religion amiable to me and the source of moral strength." Finally, he obtained a Master of Arts degree.

At this time, there came a vacancy in the parochial school of Kettle in the county of Fife. He had to compete against forty-nine others. Nervous but determined, he won the position. When the elders, who were to bestow the school, saw him, they were startled. Here before them was a young boy, a stripling, as they called him, small of stature, boyish in appearance with the ruddy flush of youth still on his cheeks. They almost reconsidered their offer, but reasoned that they could always dismiss him if he could not manage the school. They need have had no fears. He set about the task of handling approximately one hundred and twenty pupils; some of them as old or even older than himself. He seemed to devise methods to help them learn and keep busy and interested so that the school thrived under his tutelage and his ability as a teacher was recognized at this early age.

He felt that if he could acquire a position in a university he would be more secure and the remuneration greater, being ever mindful of the needs of his family. An opening did occur which he set his heart on obtaining but was doomed to disappointment.

At this time, Upper Canada had sent in an application for a qualified person to take charge of an academy which was afterwards to become a college, under the patronage of the Government of the Province. The situation was offered to two others, who turned it down, but when John's turn came, he felt he should accept, for financial reasons. The salary offered was

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much more than he was getting at home and hopes for advancement there had faded. Hence he became an unwilling exile, comforting himself in the knowledge that, if he could not be happy himself, he could at least prevent those closest to his heart from being in want.

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JOHN IN UPPER CANADA

His testimonial from the parish school of Kettle read : "The bearer, Mr. John Strachan, student in divinity, taught our school at Kettle for about two years, with much approbation and success, always conducting himself with decorum and respectability in his private deportment, and hereby heartily commended to the notice and attention of all into whose hands these presents shall come." Carrying this letter and few worldly goods, John, at the age of nineteen, set out for Upper Canada in the month of August, 1799. You can imagine him at sea, with none but the ship's company with which to converse. The ship, a slow craft via New York, made for a long and tiresome journey. It was December thirty-first before he arrived in the hamlet of Kingston, Upper Canada, where the projected college was to be.

A brief look at Upper Canada, at this time, is helpful. In 1791, the Constitutional Act had divided Quebec into Upper and Lower Canada. It is interesting to note that Upper Canada was divided into nineteen counties, which are still in existence. In 1784, the great immigration of Loyalists from the American

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Colonies took place. One by one, difficulties had been overcome - trees felled, log cabins built, land cleared and ploughed, seed sown and grain cut. Grist mills were built. Women had learned the Indian method of tanning hides. A man could make shoes for his family from leather. Hand-loom spinning wheels were never idle. Transportation and communication were improving from bush trails to crude but better roads. Here and there a little log school house was appearing, and a rough-looking church. Dishes and spoons made of wood were available. The first newspaper, **UPPER CANADA GAZETTE**, had appeared in 1793. The fur trade was the source of wealth of these settlers. It was carried on by companies and individuals. Alexander Mackenzie had reached the Arctic. David Thompson was mapping out territory west of Hudson Bay. The first Lieutenant-Governor, Lt.-Col. John Graves Simcoe, arrived in 1792. Sir Guy Carleton was Governor General. This was the picture of Upper Canada at the time of John Strachan's arrival. Naturally, regarding religion, the Anglican faith claimed the allegiance of a large number of loyalists.

John's mind had been filled with thoughts of what he might do in a new country, and visions of the new college had helped him dream his time away on the long, tedious ocean voyage. One can feel his terrible shock of disappointment to find, upon his arrival at Kingston, that all plans for the college had fallen through, due to a disagreement between Governor Simcoe and Lord Dorchester. Simcoe, whose idea it had been, had resigned in 1796 and had returned to England. All seemed lost.

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We can feel his despair in this letter to a friend at home : "Though gifted with a happy disposition and disposed to see the best side of things, I was so beat down that if I had had in my possession 20 pounds I should have returned at once, but in truth I had not 20 shillings, and was therefore obliged to make the best of it. My situation was indeed desperate for I knew not a creature. The gentleman in whose house I was to reside had no convenience for a person of retired and studious habits, and he seemed reserved and distant in manners. The few young men of the village were uneducated and inclined to practices in which I could not join."

However, John's disposition stood him in good stead. Mr. Richard Cartwright, a progressive Canadian with whom he stayed, proved to be a good friend indeed, and a very close relationship developed between the two men, which was to last the rest of their lives. Mr. Cartwright built an addition to his home which included a study for John, and it wasn't long until he was teaching again. His pupils included Mr. Cartwright's own sons and those of the Rector of Kingston, the Rev. Dr. Stuart, who was also Anglican Bishop's Official in Upper Canada. His group of pupils grew to as many as twelve.

Mr. Cartwright was a very devout Anglican, and of course a great friend of the Rector's. They often had lively religious discussions. John, having taken some courses in Divinity in Scotland, was greatly interested. He believed that every country should have an established church and that the state and church should work hand in hand. Since the Anglican Church was the established church of the mother country, he

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felt such should be the case in Upper Canada. With this in mind, combined with his teaching ability, he envisioned a worthwhile future for himself, and was resolute to take orders in the church of England. Once his mind was made up, and with the courage and will to get ahead, we can feel he entered into this with a determined and earnest spirit. He was confirmed on one of Dr. Jacob Mountain's visitations and he was ordained on May 22, 1803, then posted to the mission of Cornwall as their first Resident Rector.

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JOURNEY TO CORNWALL

Knowing something of the early life of John Strachan, now let us go along with him on his ride from Kingston to the hamlet of Cornwall. It was the lovely month of May in the year 1803. The most likely mode of travel at this time of year would be horseback, and the distance of over a hundred miles would take the better



Corduoy Bridges

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part of a week to cover. His route would be along the great St. Lawrence River, where he would find the road extremely rough, being actually Indian trails widened enough by the settlers to serve as a road. Also, it would be more hazardous at this time because long stretches would disappear with the thaw of the winter snow, and the bogging down of corduroy bridges.

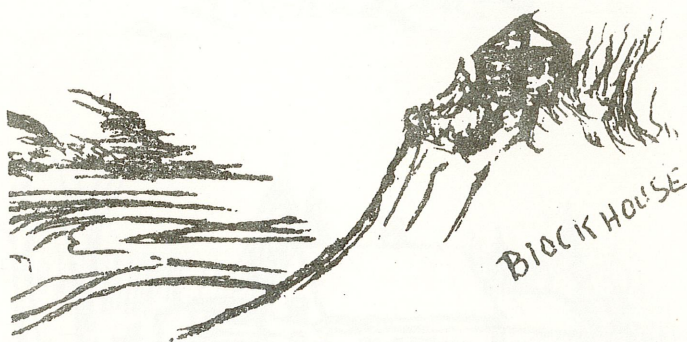
On the other hand, allowing his horse to pick its way carefully, he would be conscious, at the age of twenty-three, of the fresh spring greens, pale yellows and browns of the maple, birches, elms, poplars, oaks and butternuts, shining with the sun on them against the deep green of the giant pines and the dark forest behind them. Animal life would be all around him. The thousands of birds would be heard, singing their songs of happy anticipation of the warm summer days to come. As he passed along, the site of the Thousand Islands must have been breath-taking.

Again taking overnight lodging in areas known today as Gananoque and Brockville, wonderment would fill



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his thoughts at the huge rock formations in colours of pink, mauve and grey. Another day he would come upon the rushing, thunderous sound of the Long Sault Rapids.



Long Sault Rapids

There would be an inn in this vicinity. He would enjoy, no doubt, another stopover and drink in the magnitude of their power and stand in awe, as had many Indians and white men before him. Little would he dream that this would be harnessed and controlled by man, some two hundred years hence. As he moved along, he would know, by the increased activity of canoes and the occasional bateau and small craft, that his destination was nearing.

Although the ride would be long and tedious, the kindness and ever-welcome greeting of the inn-keepers and settlers in looking after him and his horse would

Settler's Cabin

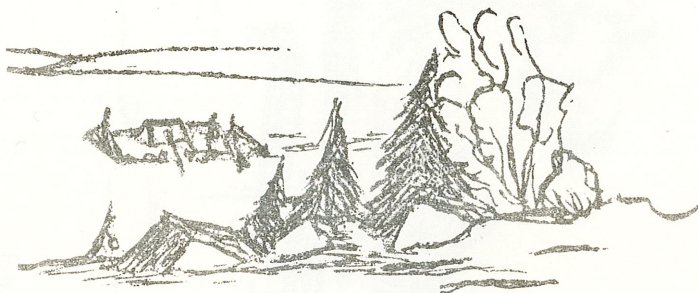


Inn along the St. Lawrence R.

fill him with a deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness.

After a few days, he drew close to a large stretch of quiet water that seemed to have left the powerful current of the great river. A deep bay had been formed and, well into it, he could see rooftops showing through the trees. As he drew near, he noticed a wharf of considerable size had been built, from which a road appeared to lead back into the group of

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dwellings. This was the settlement of Cornwall, or recorded as a police village, with a population of probably three to five-hundred. We have a feeling that he was pleased with what he saw. In 1792, Mrs. John Graves Simcoe (wife of the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada) has reported in her diary : as she passed Cornwall on her way to York, "it was a picturesque village on a well-cleared piece of land. She counted fifteen houses with neat gardens, some of them fenced about."



Hamlet of Cornwall 1803

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HAMLET OF CORNWALL

John soon found himself lodgings. After making sure he would be comfortable there for a few days and his horse cared for, he took time to see the village and visit with the settlers here, before seeking a permanent abode.

As I have said, Upper Canada was one of the provinces formed as a result of the American Revolution. Those families who had flocked here to remain under the British Crown were known as United Empire Loyalists. Sir John Johnson, son of Sir William Johnson, a well-known and wealthy American, led them through their many trials and tribulations to this part of the country. The site of Cornwall, first known as New Johnstown, was chosen as a distributing centre for the Loyalists. The commissary lived here. District and county buildings had been put up, and around 1793, a town plan had been laid out and the name changed to Cornwall, probably after Lord Cornwallis or the Duke of Cornwall, then Prince of Wales and future George Fourth of England. There were nine streets, running north and south, all given names of British royalty and nobility of the court

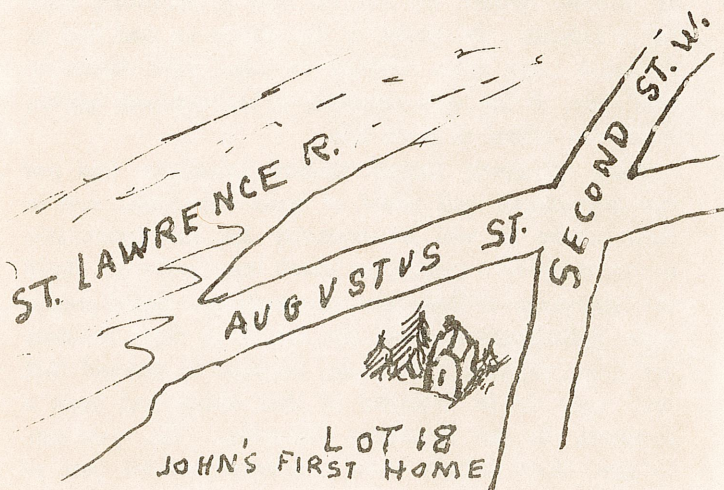
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of the reigning King George Third. These names exist today. There were a few general stores, taverns, inns, a blacksmith shop or two and perhaps a tannery, along with homes of the settlers. In 1801, a wooden court house had been built. There must have been a post office, because Cornwall had one of the first ten post masters appointed by the Government in 1803. Samuel Anderson took it the first year, then Guy Carleton Wood, a prominent citizen of Cornwall, did so in 1804 and held it for fifty years. (A memorial plaque to Mr. Wood hangs on the wall of Trinity Church).

The settlers here would be of Scottish, English and German origin, a number of whom had left good homes and considerable wealth in the United States. Also, a number of officers, soldiers and their wives and families had taken land in and around Cornwall. For a person with tremendous loyalty to England himself, it seemed to John Strachan a place where he, with his particular assets and energy, could accomplish much. The incentive to do this was deep within him, mindful of the recent American Revolution, and having come through the years of Napoleon stalking Europe and just recently crowning himself "Emperor of France". Surely, here was a place to build a stronghold of church and state for the mother country.

Soon, the Rev. Strachan took up residence on southeast corner of Second and Augustus Streets. Although his salary was one hundred and thirty pounds per annum, his mother was dependent, and other members of his family looked to him for financial help. This was constantly on his mind. He could see a great deal to be done at once, but his first

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concern was survival, to build up a reserve which would give him the moral courage to move ahead. This was given to him by his past teaching experience. He made friends easily and, being very sociable, soon became known to everyone in the hamlet, young and old. There are many amusing stories of his discomforts and privations during his early days of bachelor housekeeping. He was caught more than once feeding the dogs his efforts, but he could always cook porridge. To a young man, laundry was a problem and servants hard to get. However, the good ladies of Cornwall came to his rescue.

He was happy with his new responsibility, even to writing some fair poetry at this time. Frequently he could be heard about the streets, whistling a not-too-musical tune, but all learned to recognize to whom it belonged, and it brought many a smile. Thus, as

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he became known, he lost no time in enlisting boys for a school. He wrote to the pupils he had had in Kingston, and even offered to take John Beverley Robinson, at his own expense, if his widowed mother could not afford to send him.

Many of these United Empire Loyalists had had the advantages and profit of good education, and in their minds it was a necessity for the democratic development of a country in which they believed. Amid the hardships of their new surroundings, these people were disheartened about the future of their children and their children's children, because it seemed that they were to be deprived of that which had been a certainty in the American Colonies. So, you can imagine their delight when a grammar school (one of high-school level) was opened in Cornwall, and by an experienced and most reputable teacher who was also a clergyman of the Church of England.

News of the formation of his school spread rapidly, and it was not long before students started to arrive from all parts of Upper Canada and some from Lower Canada. Such was John Strachan's reputation as a teacher and administrator.

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FIRST GRAMMAR SCHOOL

It is advisable to look at the school situation in those early days. Previous to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the only schools in existence in Upper Canada were private enterprises, and appear to have been few and not too efficient. True, the little log school had been built here and there, where settlers could manage one, but the settlers had been so busy making a living for themselves that there had been little time to give to plans for education. As we have stated, Lt.-Gov. Simcoe had hoped to establish grammar schools, but he had been recalled to England. His reason had been sound.

He was afraid that if Canada and the British Government did not do this, some students desirous of such would go to the American Colonies, where education, was cheaper, and might be perverted from British principles or loyalty.

However, as fate would have it, a more suitable person couldn't have come to fulfill the wishes of Governor Simcoe than John Strachan, and to such a receptive little settlement as Cornwall of those days. The results verify this. Our history proves him a controversial figure. All his life he engaged in

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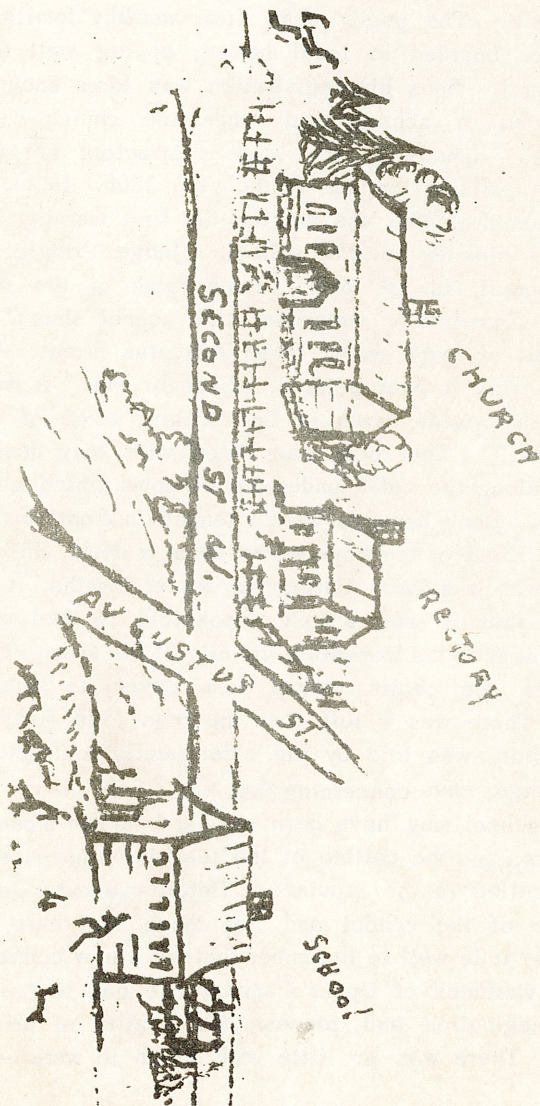
disputes, arguments and spirited discussions, but isn't education still the cause of such turmoil today? Remember, he was as intensely loyal as these early settlers. He was human and commanded the respect and admiration of the majority. His family life was a long one, but at all times full of harmony and bliss, despite much sadness in it. His ambition was to make Upper Canada a loyal British Colony, using church and school as his means.

The Loyalists were no sooner settling nicely into a pattern of life when a great threat appeared. A good many of the colonists to the south of them had heard that beautiful Indian land was cheap in Canada, and that there was a sale for almost any commodity they could produce. Moreover, to make it easy for them, Governor Simcoe, in his effort to increase the population, made many promises. They were not all Loyalists, and many were land-grabbers and had rebellious thoughts about this new country of ours. Only persons with the spirit, knowledge and courage of John Strachan could stand up to them and save the country.

It wasn't long until John secured a grant of land from the Crown, which originally included five lots on the corner section of Augustus and Second Streets, West, four acres to be exact. His clerical duties were not such as to take up his full time; but a church he must have, and a church he got. Of this we will say more later. Since church and school were as one to him, we will tell of the school just now.

During the supervision of the building of the church, he taught diligently, probably in his own living quarters. The number of pupils was increasing

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rapidly. It was like bringing an industry to the settlement. The pupils came from wealthy families and were boarded in local homes, paying well for their board. Soon his registration was large enough to warrant a school, and when the church was completed, apparently the same contractors set up a school building for him, in the year 1806. He must have been delighted and excited the first morning he took his classes to that school. Judge Pringle, a former pupil, in his book "Lunenburgh or the old Eastern Districts", describes the school thus: "It was built of rough wood, faced Augustus Street. At no time was it ever painted, inside or out. It was never comfortable, even in the earliest stage of its existence." The room was fitted with long desks placed along the sides under the windows which were high up. Long benches were arranged in front of the desks. Eight or ten boys would be at a desk. In the centre was a stove. During the winter months, it is related that it was almost impossible to feel any heat, except in the immediate vicinity of the stove. The ages of the pupils ranged from seven to seventeen. There was a loft over the room, and many a weird story was told by the older pupils to frighten the younger ones concerning that loft.

The school may have been cold and lacked modern facilities, but the calibre of the teaching was superb and excelled in the province. Before we enter into the life of the school and, for those who care to criticize, it is well to remember that, in a new country in the vastness of Upper Canada, one had to teach with imagination and possess the quality of originality. There was so little with which to work - a

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slate, a pencil, a copybook. In light of the equipment in a modern classroom of any age group, it was pitiable.

John Strachan's energy was boundless. He wrote essays and articles on subjects current and past. When he could not find suitable text books, he wrote them himself. His "Treatise on Arithmetic" is an excellent work, though its examples of the various rules have a sardonic twist.

In his teaching he encouraged original work in all subjects, and methodically kept "Merit Books", in which were entered the best of these. His method of having the boys debate monthly on current issues, and particularly those that were creating a stir in the British Parliament, led by the younger Pitt, kept them ever conscious of a loyalty to Britain. This aspect of their schooling was largely responsible for the contributions these pupils made in later life to the leadership, development and progress of the future Upper Canada. Reading, Writing, Geography, Euclid, Latin, Algebra and Science were taught in like manner, with a view to the future. The Rev. Strachan kept up a correspondence with all educational and church officials in the mother country who, he felt, might help his cause here. His school was such a going concern that, in 1806, he was able to open a separate building that became known throughout the country as the Cornwall Grammar School, the first of its kind in Upper Canada. This same year, the Upper Canada legislature gave him, in values of today close to, two thousand dollars worth of science equipment for the school, the vacuum pump he used is still on display at the Cornwall Collegiate and Vocational School.

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Largely through the exertions of this young man, the legislature passed an Act in 1807 for a grammar school to be established in each of the four districts of Upper Canada : Nassau, Hesse, Mecklenburgh and Lunenburg.

Through his pupils he met a number of the wealthy Montrealers engaged in the fur trade. These and other distinguished persons were encouraged to visit the school and did just that, and certainly were not likely to leave such a worthwhile enterprise without leaving a contribution. He, in turn, visited these people, which enabled him to keep his finger on the pulse of the whole of Canada at that time. He would likely witness the first steamer launched in Montreal in 1809. A ferry had been established from the Cornwall Wharf to St. Regis Island, which had two canoes and three boats available at all times.

There was never a dull moment in the life of the school and very few failed. Those who could not adjust to studies were sent home. On one occasion the Rev. Strachan said, "It has ever been my conviction that our scholars should be considered for the time being our children, and that as parents we should study their peculiar dispositions, if we really wish to improve them, for, if we feel not something of the tender relation of parents towards them, as pupils, we cannot expect them to be successful in their own career."

It is interesting to note the character of the training and nature of the studies which called forth the ability and stimulated the intellectual zeal of his pupils. To begin with, there were daily registers, in which all individual achievements were kept and also who stood at the head and who at the foot on

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that day. Then came the weekly register, which was a summation of these and read aloud at the end of the week. Then followed the monthly register called the "Book of Merit". If a student had done a top standard piece of work in any subject he was allowed to copy it into this book. To get something into the "Merit Book" was indeed an Honour to which all aspired. Particular attention was given to poetry or prose.

In writing quotes examples of those chosen and frequently copied are as follows : "The patient, diligent, methodical opinions of persons of credit are frequently taken by men without education and erroneous deducations made."

"It is only the man who is not afraid to decide for himself, that can discharge any office he may hold with probity and honour."

"He who wishes to be a good man must begin by being a dutiful child."

"Cultivate virtues which dignify the human character. They will keep you above malice, contention and disorder and give you joy and expectation for the hereafter."

The question and answer method had to be used extensively, and handled as it was, with severe consequences for those who did not pay attention, it proved very effectual.

Of course there was "Black Monday", the morning of which, immediately after prayers, punishment took place for poor work and misdemeanours committed during the week. There was the sounding lash, all witnessed the shrinking and contortions of the unfortunate ones but the punishment was meted out

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without prejudice and not in temper. The pupils seem to have accepted it as fair.

One only has to be reminded, these were harsh days in which to live. The laws of the land were strict and to us today, cruel. Cornwall was no exception. The accused of various offences from petty larceny to disobeying the Sabbath, were fined, whipped, exposed to the pillory or even burned in the hand with a red hot iron, according to the gravity of the offences. Judge Pringle tells of witnessing a flogging administered at the corner of Fourth and Pitt Streets. Men and women were treated alike. All felt this had to be; progress would not be made without the safety and protection of its inhabitants.

John's system of having sixteen censors periodically elected by the school, to act with the principal in all matters of administration, was tremendous in the strength and support it gave. They kept the registers, looked after property (one boy had written home to please send him a slate with a hardwood frame as that was all that would last here), mended the pens(quills), prepared headlines for writing books, reported on absences and delinquencies and taught Junior pupils.

The Public Examinations held by the school once a year brought the well-to-do parents from far and wide and became one of the important social events of the year. Between examinations original poetry and prose would be read; often there was a debate arranged on current issues. Prizes would be awarded and the afternoon would be brought to a close by short speeches given by the officiating guests.

Mr. and Mrs. Strachan gave a banquet for out-of-town guests and dignitaries in town. A ball was arranged

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for the young people in the evening to which the boys were all invited. This was a day long to be remembered by many.

And so the Cornwall Grammar School became known throughout the length and breadth of the land. Almost all the pupils of John Strachan later became advocates of the principles for which he stood. This school proved the training ground for many leaders in the first half-century of the history of Canada.

In 1833, twenty years after he came to Cornwall, forty-two of John Strachan's former pupils gathered to give him a testimonial dinner and presented their beloved master with an embossed address and a large beautiful piece of silver.

Sir John Johnston may have been Cornwall's first important person but John Strachan was certainly its second.

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A CHURCH IS BUILT

Because John Strachan took pupils as early as the autumn of 1803, I have written of the development of his famous grammar school first. However, as soon as he arrived in Cornwall, the concern closest to his heart was the church. He had become dedicated to the idea of setting up a union of one church and one state, as existed in England, and at no time in his life was he ever persuaded to think otherwise, and he lived to be ninety. Religion, to him, was less a sentiment than a duty. Compassion and charity were his. He loved children and they loved him. Although he was always on the alert for ways to raise money, he regarded money as a talent, to make, to give. He loved it for its own sake as a necessity in life, and no surprise was expressed that he saved little and died poor.

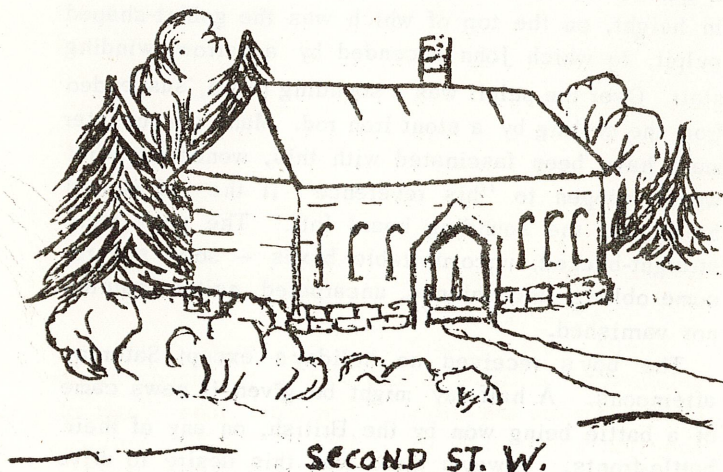
Trinity had its origin in a mission which was established in 1784 to minister to the needs of the United Empire Loyalists. The Rev. John Stuart of Kingston had sent visiting clergy. The first services were held in private homes. Then, in 1787, the first church house was established and the Parish of

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of Trinity was founded, with John Smith and John Pescod as the first wardens. (A stained glass window, honouring them, is in the present church.)

In 1800, a sum of money had been subscribed to build a church. In early 1805, another meeting was held, chaired by John Strachan, at which it was decided to carry out this plan at once. The work was completed in the last month of that year, and on January 26, 1806, the first meeting was held in the new church, for the sale of pews.

The design of the church reflected John's originality. Of the interior, one may say there never was or has been one like it since. It was 52' x 36' x 18', raised on a stone foundation.



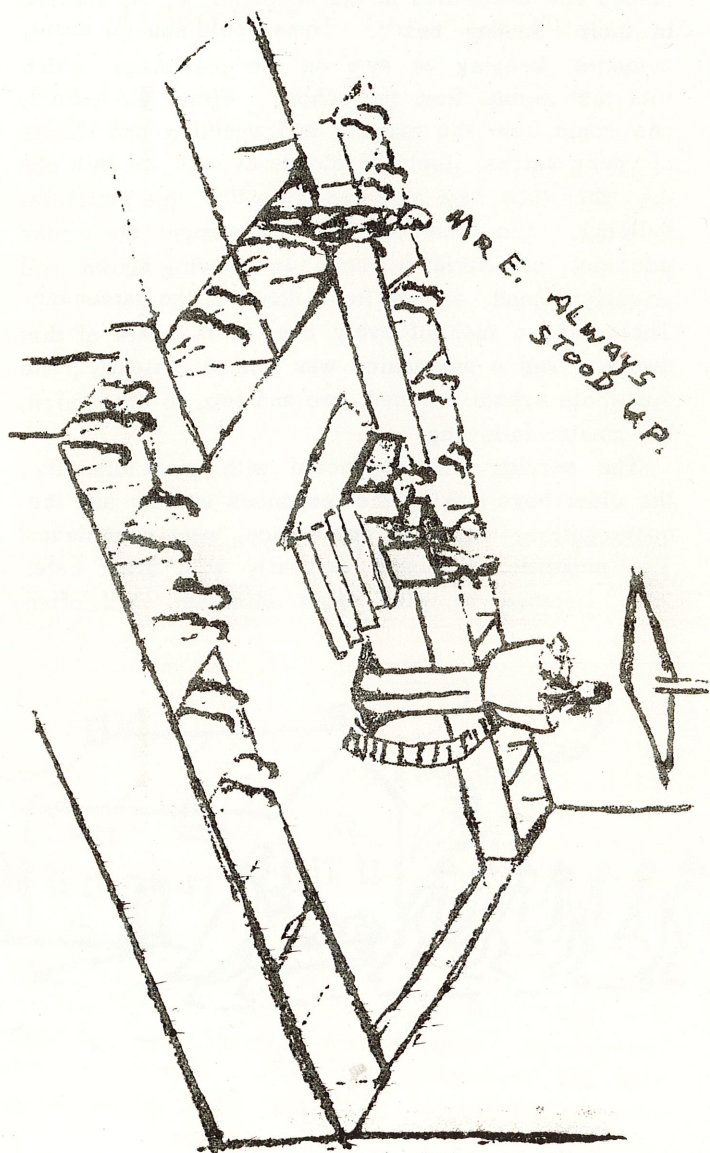
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It was a plain wooden building; the outside was painted white and the inside was just rough, unfinished wood. There was no vestry. In those days, the clergyman wore a white surplice when reading, during the service, and a black gown when preaching. The Rev. Strachan just changed his vestments in front of the congregation. The reading desks were arranged in a manner quite unusual to the times. First, there was the desk for the clerk, a small square enclosure, raised a step or two from the floor. Immediately behind this was the desk from which the clergyman read the service. It was of a similar shape, only two or three steps higher. Behind this was the pulpit, which was quite imposing. It looked very much like a goblet, and consisted of a pillar, six or seven feet in height, on the top of which was the goblet-shaped pulpit, to which John ascended by a narrow, winding stair. Over the pulpit was a sounding board, suspended from the ceiling by a stout iron rod. Many a youngster must have been fascinated with this, wondering what would happen to "his reverence" if the rod should break and the sounding board fall. The pews were straight-backed, uncomfortable boxes - some square, some oblong, uncushioned, uncarpeted, neither painted nor varnished.

The boys received no holidays except Saturday afternoons. A half-day might be given if news came of a battle being won by the British, on any of their battle-fronts. Always there was this desire to drive home the importance of Britain. Consequently the boys looked forward to Sunday after church, when they could be more or less on their own.

On Sunday morning they came from their boarding

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places and assembled at the schoolhouse, all dressed in their "Sunday best". Some would saunter about, outdoors, keeping an eye on the parsonage, which was just across from the school. Within the school, one could hear the romping and tumbling and shouts of young voices, likely in clouds of dust, on this one day when they were able to "let go" in this particular building. But order resumed the moment the young principal presented himself, in flowing gown and powdered head, at the front door of the parsonage. There was a rush of every boy to the gate of that dwelling and a procession was formed instantly; and the whole school marched, two and two, to the church, the master following.

The service was conducted with great formality, the older boys making the responses audibly and the congregation, rustic in appearance, were very devout. The sermons, composed evidently with great care, were listened to with eager attention, and often





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elicited the admiration of the boys as well as the parishioners. The story goes that old Mr. S. . . led the singing in tremulous and quivering tones, very few joining with him. Then there was Mr. E. . . , who invariably stood up, about the middle of the sermon and, facing the clergyman, kept his eyes fixed on him until all was concluded. This caused a great deal of merriment among the boys.

There was just one service on Sunday, but of course daily prayers were held the first thing every morning, in the school.

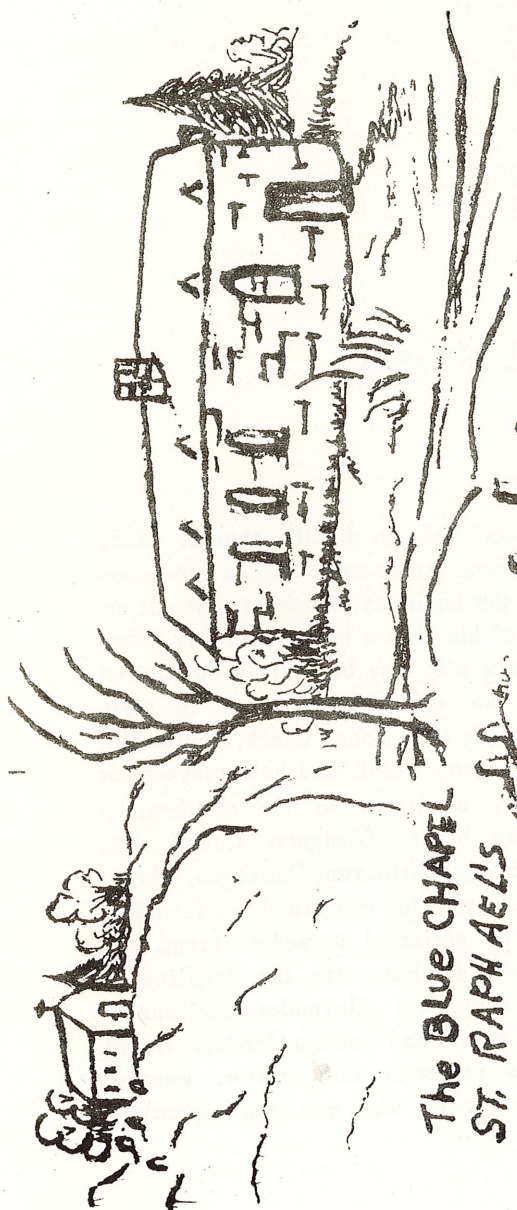
On Sunday afternoon, the boys were at liberty to walk, visit or ride where they pleased. There would be plenty to do, probably fishing on the banks of the St. Lawrence or visiting the busy wharf at the foot of Augustus Street, maybe wangling a ride in a canoe or watching an Indian encampment, which were numerous around and about Cornwall. These boys seldom misbehaved themselves, for John Strachan believed in delegating authority: Censors were appointed by him for the week, and on Monday morning they turned in their reports as to any misdemeanours they had observed, at any time during the week, and suitable punishment was in store for such culprits on "Black Monday". The censors were chosen carefully as their good judgment and fairness.

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LIFE IN CORNWALL AND AREA

As the school flourished, so did the church. Many a one would have been exhausted after a strenuous day of attending to the business of school, but not our John. That horse of his would be saddled (his riding crops and those of his wife may be seen in our United Counties Museum), and off he would go to visit settler's cabins in Apple Hill, Moose Creek, Moulinette, Mille Roches, or Glengarry Point, and hold prayers, or help with the sick, or listen to the children.

He loved to take off to Glengarry County: St. Raphael's, Williamstown, Martintown, Dunvegan, where he found many of his own kin, and his thirst for news of Scotland would be satisfied to some extent. In Williamstown, he would visit with the families of Canada's greatest explorers: Alexander MacKenzie, who had reached the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. David Thompson, who was exploring the interior, west of Hudson's Bay: Simon Fraser, who was charting untrod



The BLUE CHAPEL
ST. RAPHAEL'S

THE STONE CHURCH
ST ANDREWS

BURIAL ground of John Sandfield MacDonald
and Simon Fraser

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country and rivers. In return, he would bring news to them of his contacts with the rest of Upper Canada, the United States, and last but not least, Britain the country, to which they all gave their allegiance.

Being a great friend of Rev. Alexander Macdonell, who came from Scotland in 1804, he would visit the famous little "Blue Chapel" of St. Raphael's, so named for the ceiling painted in blue which stood on a high hill looking over the glens, a fitting monument to his predecessor, the first Roman Catholic clergyman who built it, in 1790 (and who had died in 1804).

Also, he would call in to see the little round stone church at St. Andrews, built by the Rev. Father Roderick Macdonell, of the Roman Catholic church.

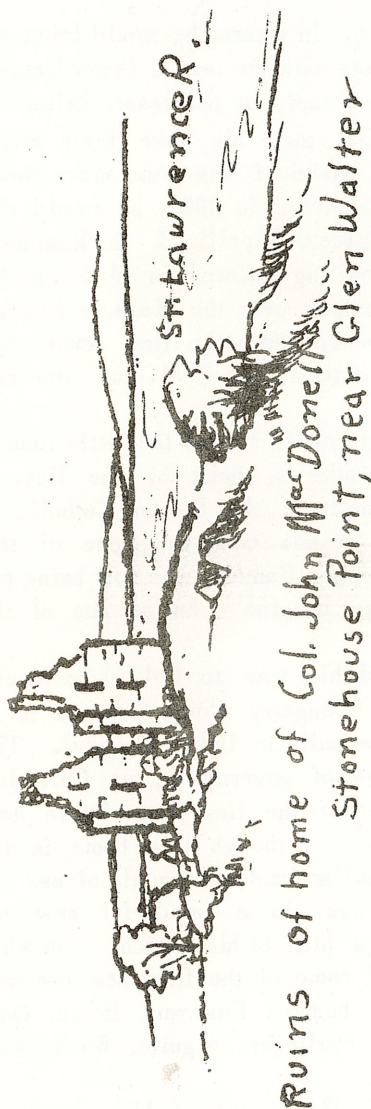
"The Upper Canada Gazette", one of the first newspapers of Upper Canada, was now being published. One can imagine John as one of the first subscribers.

He would find his way to Col. John MacDonell's stone house on Glengarry Point (reputed to be the first stone house built in Upper Canada). There he would seek news of government, as Col. John was the first Speaker of the first Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada. Although this home is in ruins now, it is a familiar landmark to all of us.

A wonderful age, in a wonderful new country!

According to a plan of his church, in which are written names of some of the first pew owners, John visited in these homes: Eastman, Bruce, Gallinger, French, Empey, Farlinger, Alguire, Wood, Kory and Link.

Dr. George T. Wood, one of his parishioners, a



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soldier-doctor of the First Dragoon Guards, played an influential part in the early life of the village. John was a frequent and welcome visitor to his home, where there were two daughters and a son (Guy Carleton Wood), and where there was much music and laughter. John, being a person of quick decisions, fell head over heels in love with Ann, the second daughter, who was betrothed to young Andrew McGill (of the famous family which founded McGill University in Montreal), the marriage to take place in the near future. John had so little to offer in the way of security, he knew his case was hopeless. However, on the eve of her marriage, he is alleged to have remarked: "I can wait". As fate would have it, his waiting period was not to be for long. After two years of marriage, Andrew McGill died, Ann returned to Cornwall, and in 1807 was married to John. At the time, she was twenty-two and he was twenty-seven. The Rev. John Bethune, a very good friend, performed the ceremony. He was of the Presbyterian Church.

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MARRIAGE AND DEPARTURE

Of Ann Wood McGill, now Mrs. Strachan, it is said: "She was a devoted wife and mother, a woman of great personal attractions and unsurpassed as a house-keeper." They were a very popular young couple in the growing life of Cornwall. It may be noted that a family of eight blessed this union, and there was an adopted child. James, Elizabeth and George were born in Cornwall.

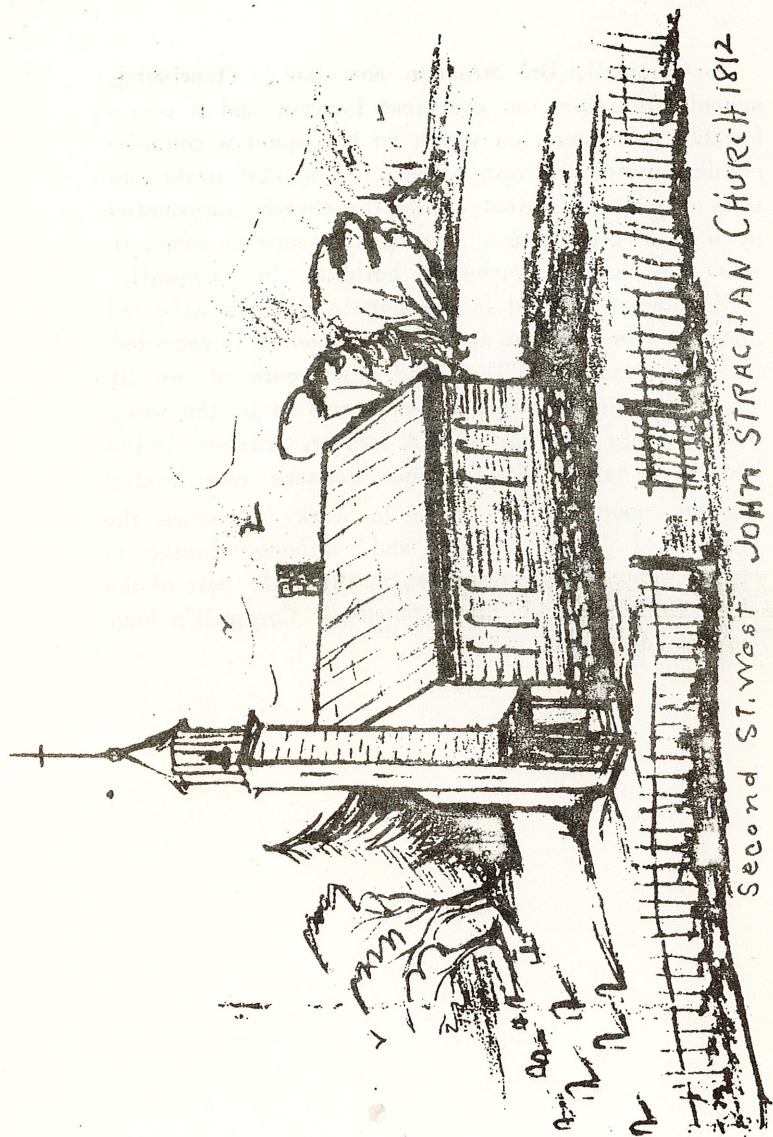
The boys of the school were very excited with the marriage, as was natural. They described their young schoolmaster as "passionately in love". When the parsonage was built, almost opposite the school (of today on present church property), all that concerned it was of intense interest to them—the comings and goings of friends, babies, parishioners, servants—in the next few years. It was an exemplary picture of family life in a new country to carry with them for all time.

In 1811, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred on John by the University of Aberdeen.

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In Cornwall, Dr. Strachan now had a flourishing school, furnishing an excellent income, and a comfortable parsonage, on which he had spent a considerable sum of his own money. A square tower had been added to the west end of the church, surmounted by a tin-covered spire. For many years to come, it was the most noticeable building in Cornwall.

Happiness reigned in his home, with his wife and family. His cup was full. No wonder it is recorded in his memoirs: "The best nine years of my life were spent in Cornwall". As seems to be the way, peace of his was not to last forever. Higher circles had been taking notice, and pressure was finally brought upon him to move to York (Toronto), the capital of Upper Canada and, although loathe to leave, along with his family, in the early part of the year 1812, he took his departure. Cornwall's loss but Canada's gain.

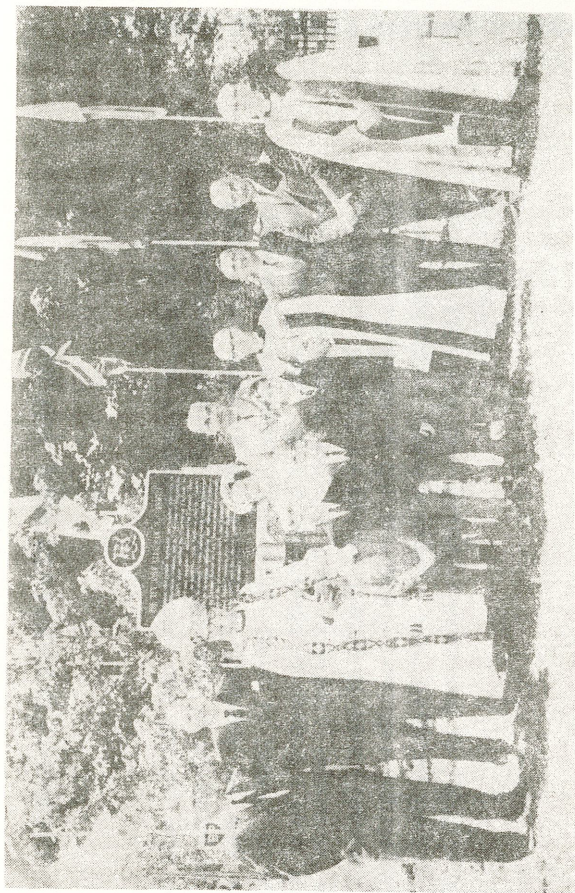


Second St. West JOHN STRACHAN Church 1812

THE REV. JOHN STRACHAN IN CORNWALL

This pioneer clergyman, legislator and teacher was born in 1778 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and in 1799 came to Kingston as a tutor. In 1803, after entering the Church of England, he was ordained and appointed missionary at Cornwall. Here, in 1804-5, he built its first Anglican Church. Shortly afterwards he opened a boys' school which became renowned for its high academic standards and eminent graduates. In 1812 he became Rector of York (Toronto), and subsequently a member of the province's executive and legislative councils. Appointed Upper Canada's first Anglican Bishop in 1839, he died in 1867 and this church, commenced in 1869, is dedicated to his memory.

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Courtesy of Ministry of Industry and Tourism, Ontario

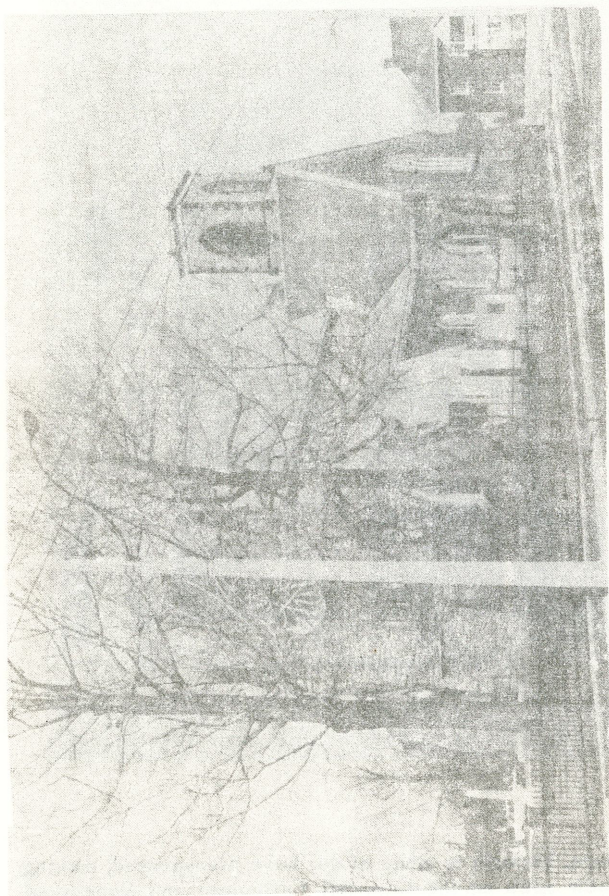
Dignitaries from Cornwall, across Ontario and four direct descendants of Loyalist families take part in the unveiling of the church plaque.

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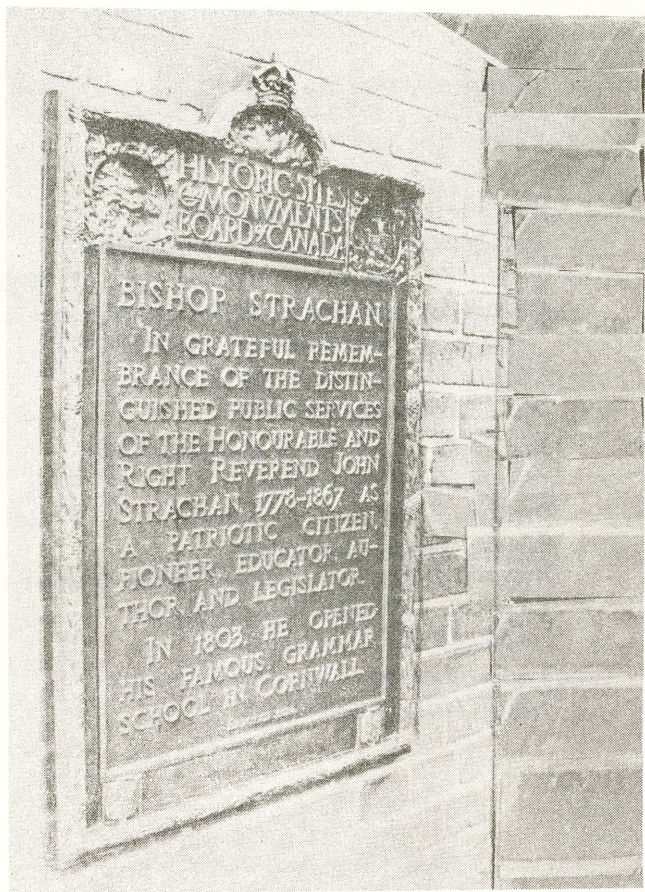
These doors, historic to many of us, have disappeared, making way for new ones as the Cornwall Collegiate and Vocational School continues to expand. One pays tribute to the teachers, and the city administrators responsible for carrying on the tradition of John Strachan's Grammar School.

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Courtesy of Mr. G.B. Sidwill

Trinity (Bishop Strachan Memorial) Church Second Street
West, Cornwall, Ontario



Plaque erected on the Cornwall Collegiate Institute in 1928 by the Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada.

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Dorothy J. Phelps was born in Fort William, now Thunder Bay, Ontario. She is a graduate of the Fort William Collegiate Institute, and North Bay Normal School, obtaining a diploma from the Ontario College of Art as "Supervisor of Art for Public Schools." She taught for a number of years in Fort William, where she was an ardent student of history in that area. Coming to Cornwall in 1938, she became an active participant in community activities, continuing her painting and historical studies.

She is a past president of the Cornwall Art Club; an honorary life member of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Historical Society; and the first president of the newly organized "Anglican Church Women," of Trinity Church. In 1967, she was the chairman of the Women's Centennial Activities Committee for Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. She now enjoys retirement in Cornwall.